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Why College?

College is part of the human experience for most people; it is another step in the trail of life. However, the motivation behind continuing one's education is ambiguous, and it depends on each individual. Experts in higher education have been debating the purpose of college since its formation hundreds of years ago. Using readings written by college professors, presidents of universities, and experts in psychology and sociology, it is apparent that the debate continues. These scholars and commentators feel that college should focus on personal growth and educational purposes, mainly individual and societal development. Bettering the college students would allow society to understand multiculturalism and different perspectives, a sense of civic responsibility, and a mindset that encourages growth.

College is an opportunity for growth and new beginnings. Therefore, it would make sense for people to advocate for higher education. One of those people is Andrew Delbanco, a professor of American Studies at Columbia University. He proclaims that university is essential for developing the human mind. That "the existing foundations of political, social, and economic life...are viewed as aspirational goals toward... [the] moral and material reasons to strive" (Delbanco 31). He feels that this liberal curriculum is the purpose of college, that being exposed to different perspectives allows students to become tolerant of the unknown and unexpected. With this statement, Delbanco argues that college students are better prepared for the real world than those who do not go.

The "What Is College For?" commentary features scholars and administrators in higher education. Some writers include Michael V. Drake, the Chancellor of the University of California at Irvine, and Brenda Hellyer, the Chancellor of San Jacinto College. Each contributor gave their perspective on higher education, each having a different opinion. Many of these writers advocated educational purposes, others for personal development.

With Michael V. Drake, the answer to the college's purpose is ambiguous. Differences within every aspect of life can define one's rationale for attending. Some students might use this opportunity for practical purposes, while others improve and develop their genuine sense. As such, Drake views that "[he wants his] students to grow and mature, to learn and develop, both academically and personally" (Drake 8).

Brenda Hellyer holds a similar view to Michael V. Drake since they view college as a place for "personal and intellectual growth, about finding new dimensions of understanding, and about gaining knowledge" (Hellyer 10). It is worth noting that both contributors feel that personal growth is not the only aspect significant to college students. The practical part of education is that getting a degree and a job is still necessary. In contrast to Drake, Hellyer deduces that the educational portion is equal to other developments since she works for a smaller college.

Expanding opportunities is not the only purpose of college, and one must also learn how to interact in their environment. For example, learning civics in school is one way to develop. However, even if one could learn these concepts outside of school, it is not the same as interacting with peers. Therefore, various experts in the community have debated and analyzed why student involvement in higher education is more critical for societal purposes, even more than the academic portion. Some of these researchers include Michael V. Drake, Anne Colby, a

consulting professor at Stanford University, and Mark Edmundson, an award-winning professor of English at the University of Virginia.

According to Michael V. Drake, the college experience is a set of pillars. Students can experience the first two pillars in the classroom. At the same time, the latter two, "leadership excellence and character excellence," are characterized by the campus values such as respect, intellectual curiosity, and integrity. (Drake 9) Exclusively academic colleges and universities would obscure these values.

Anne Colby took Drake's values and twisted them into an academic perspective. In contrast to Drake's easy-going impression, Colby, a consulting professor at Stanford University, maintains that "moral and civic development is enhanced by mutually interdependent sets of knowledge, virtues, and skills" (Colby 225). Her view is more nuanced and detailed than Drake's because of her insight into this issue. The school is responsible for teaching civic and moral engagement from her perspective.

The instructions that Colby proposes should not "be separated from the virtues and skills that a morally and civically responsible individual should strive to attain" (Colby 225). Expanding upon Colby's analysis, it is evident that she advocates for the teaching of moral and civic responsibility via the academic route. The major takeaway from Colby's essay is that students should recognize the moral and civic dimensions of issues and take a stand on those issues, leading to the betterment of society in Colby's eyes.

Progressing from Anne Colby, other commentators such as Mark Edmundson deviate from this point of view. Edmundson is an award-winning professor of English at the University of Virginia. Instead, Edmundson argues that the students have to be tailored to the college system, "well-rounded students, civic leaders, people who know what the system demands"

(Edmundson 462). The civic portion of college that Anne Colby advocates for should already be fostered from earlier experiences, as argued by Mark Edmundson. Students have been through years of schooling; thus, they have some basic knowledge. Colby's argument relies too much on the theoretical properties of this civic education concept, while Edmundson expresses how it works in reality.

They should develop a specific mindset that allows for failure to succeed in college. Carol Dweck is a psychology professor at Stanford University who has been studying the mindset phenomenon for many years. In her best-selling 2006 book "Mindset: The New Psychology of Success," Dweck proposes two different mindsets that people could have: the fixed attitude and the growth mindset.

Dweck defines the fixed attitude as a mindset where people cannot change their fundamental qualities and abilities (Dweck 671). People with this mindset tend to view life from a pessimistic perspective, with a certain amount of intelligence, a particular personality, and a specific moral character.

In contrast to the fixed perspective, Dweck defines the growth mindset as a perspective that "is based on the belief that [one's] basic qualities are things [one] can cultivate through [one's] efforts" (Dweck 672). Since people differ in all aspects, such as their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments, people with the growth mindset imagine that everyone can change and grow through application and experience.

Dweck's research goes beyond her own beliefs and allows herself to be influenced by other researchers in psychology. She appeals to authority by mentioning the impacts of Gilbert Gottlieb and Robert Sternberg, some of the most notable names in psychology. Dweck's other inspirations assume that the mindset people have is not constant. Gottlieb and Sternberg, two

leading scientists Dweck leaned upon for research, suspect that the environment influences intelligence. That intelligence "is not some fixed prior ability, but purposeful engagement" (Dweck 671). Moreover, college is the perfect place for purposeful engagement because students would have plenty of opportunities to thrive.

The fixed and growth mindsets can change one's experience in college. Growth mindset, students tend to focus more on their personal development. They want to enjoy everything around them and look forward to new experiences. In contrast, the fixed mindset students are only there for the classes. They are not interested in the extracurricular activities, and extra opportunities college can provide.

Dweck argues that the growth mindset allows people to expand on themselves. With this attitude, one accepts that they could develop and are open to accurate information about their current abilities, even if it is unflattering.

Expanding upon Dweck's hypothesis, Angela Duckworth relates Dweck's growth mindset with grit. Duckworth is a Psychology professor at the University of Pennsylvania. She thinks that the growth mindset would be suitable for building up the spirit, especially when dealing with failures. The educators involved in the process should help the students succeed with the best ideas and people possible to form a college that fosters personal development (Duckworth 5:40). She ends her point by stating that we all have to be willing to fail, which all college students should embrace before entering the real world.

One might be looking back at college's purpose and wonder if it is truly worth the time, money, and energy, but it depends on what one wants to become. Expanding opportunities and finding oneself in college could benefit some people's paths while it could detriment others. To realize that college is truly meant for somebody, one must assess their abilities and determine

what makes them. A four-year education will influence how people perceive their lives and develop skills that one could not learn otherwise. The trail of life might seem wobbly or unpaved at times, but it is essential to remember that college could influence how one travels down the track.

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